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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 GUATEMALA 001320

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DRL/CRA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM KIRF GT

SUBJECT: GUATEMALA: 2002 RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT UPDATE

1. Post recommends the following updates to the 2002 country report on religious freedom for Guatemala:

Section I.

No changes.

Section II.

Legal/Policy Framework

Paragraph 1: Please replace "In April 2002, on the seventh anniversary of the signing of the accord, the U.N. Verification Mission noted that there had been little progress in its implementation" with "In May 2003, the U.N. Verification Mission noted in its presentation to the international donor community at the Consultative Group that the accord continued to face serious barriers to its implementation."

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Paragraph 1: Please add as last sentence: "The Commission has not taken action to protect any specific sacred sites since its inception."

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Paragraph 1

Please replace entire paragraph with:

An appeal remains pending in the Constitutional Court regarding the June 2001 conviction of three military officers and an assistant priest for the 1998 murder of Bishop Juan Gerardi, the Coordinator of the Archbishop's office on Human Rights (ODHA). In October 2002, an appeals court annulled the 2001 conviction and ordered a retrial, which the ODHA immediately appealed to the Supreme Court. In February 2003, the Supreme Court Appellate Chamber confirmed the June 2001 trial, a decision which the defense then appealed to the Constitutional Court.

Paragraph 2

Please replace entire paragraph with the following three paragraphs:

There were multiple reports of assassinations of religious leaders of various denominations over the last year, though evidence has not surfaced in any of the cases to suggest that the murders were related to the individuals' religious practices. In October 2002, Mayan spiritual leader Antonio Pop Caal was kidnapped and murdered in Coban, Alta Verapaz province. His alleged murderers are being held in custody and a trial is pending. In December 2002, Mayan priest Marcos Sical Perez, was murdered by unknown assailants in Salama, Baja Verapaz province. An investigation is pending. In April 2003, human rights activist and Mayan priest Diego Xon Salazar was murdered in Chichicastenango, Quiche province. Xon Salazar had reportedly received multiple death threats related to his work denouncing the resurgence of the civilian defense patrols (ex-PACs) in the Quiche. The investigation of his murder is pending. In May 2003, Mayan priest Gerardo Camo Manuel was murdered during a religious ceremony in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz province, after reportedly receiving death threats from one or more members of his community.

Also in May 2003, evangelical pastor Oscar Armando Montiel Montalvan was murdered during an evening service in his parish in San Juan Sacatepequez, Sacatepequez province. While the police continue to investigate the crime, none of his congregation has testified to the identity of the assailants, leading the police to speculate that witnesses fear retribution. Catholic priest Edgar Estuardo del Cid was kidnapped, detained, and threatened for several hours along with three parishioners in Guanagazapa, Escuintla province. In the report filed with the Public Ministry, the victims attributed the crime to del Cid's criticism of social injustice during his homilies.

While these crimes have not been linked to religious persecution, they do represent a disturbing trend of targeting voices of dissent against the corruption and impunity that plague Guatemalan society.

Section III.

Paragraph 1: Final sentence, delete "lynching," replace "such activities against" with "attacks on"

Paragraph 3: Replace first sentence with, "Within the Jewish community, there were no reported incidents of Anti-Semitism."

Paragraph 4: Delete first sentence.

Paragraph 6
Please insert, "The Ecumenical Forum's leadership council continues to meet on a monthly basis, maintaining dialogue between most religious groups operating in Guatemala."
Section IV.

HAMILTON